

**WEBINAR REPORT**  
**COVID 19 & DISASTER PREPAREDNESS –**  
**ADDRESSING COMMUNITIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

- Organized By** : **Kerala State Disaster Management Authority in Association with Inter-University Centre for Disability Studies, MG University**
- Date** : **24<sup>th</sup> August 2020**
- Time** : **2.00 pm to 3.30 pm**
- Mode of Meeting** : **Google Meet**
- Opening Remarks & Inauguration** : **Dr. Sekhar L Kuriakose, Member Secretary KSDMA**
- Keynote Address** : **Dr. P T Baburaj, Director, IUCDS**
- Moderator** : **Mr. Joe John George, SPO, KSDMA**  
**Brahma N Mahadevan, Chairman, OJASS (Organization for the joined Action of Special Schools)**
- Speakers** : **Adv Febby Leo Mathew, Legal Consultant, Disability (Former Consultant, NIEPMD)**  
**Dr. Hena N N, Lecturer, IUCDS**

In the run-up to the COVID 19 & Disaster Preparedness, KSDMA organized a series of webinars on disaster preparedness during this pandemic situation. The objective of the webinar served both to disseminate the knowledge to the public and to receive feedback and gather inputs on the measures taken to prepare for and reduce the effects of the disaster during this pandemic.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> series of the webinar – “**COVID 19 & Disaster Preparedness 2020 – Addressing Communities with Special Needs (Intellectually Impaired)**” Organised by Kerala State Disaster Management Authority in association with Inter-University Centre for Disability Studies, MG University was held on **24 August 2020, at 2:00 PM** with an inaugural speech of **Dr. Sekhar L Kuriakose, Member Secretary, KSDMA**. He gave a brief introduction to this webinar series organized by KSDMA and suggested to institutionalised this for further research.

**Dr. P T Baburaj, Director, IUCDS** presented the Keynote address and discussed how to address the intellectually impaired communities during any disaster. He projected a clear understanding of the stress exerted on the parents and caretakers of the intellectually impaired during any disaster.

**Joe George, State Project Officer, KSDMA** co-ordinated the webinar.

At the outset, **Dr. Pratheesh C Mammen, Project Coordinator, UNICEF** welcomed all the participants and initiated the webinar. The webinar was attended by 50 participants. The webinar was structured in an introduction and keynote address, three presentations each followed by Q&A, a panel discussion with the presenters, and feedback from the participants about this webinar.

First Speaker, **Brahma N Mahadevan, Chairman, Organization for the Joined Action of Special School – OJASS** opened the webinar by providing an overview of the situation of the intellectually impaired during this pandemic and shared his experience during the last floods (2018 & 2019). He explained the importance of the principle of quality, inclusive education, both in and out of the classroom by the involvement of parents and caretakers and the community. Also, in his view, the mutual collaboration is probably one of the most valuable assets and a longstanding tradition among people with disabilities. He inspired the audience by sharing the experience of the training programs conducted by some NGOs. One such programme was “Veedu Oru Vidyalayam”. Also, he shared his thoughts on how to engage the children to make them more active during this pandemic situation.

Second Speaker, **Adv. Febby Leo Mathew, Legal Consultant, Disability (Former Consultant, NIEPMDI)** walked through the RPwD Act 2016 in detail which is a milestone in the struggle for equal opportunities for disabled people in India.

Important Points in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 explained by the speaker

- State Governments will constitute district-level committees to address the local issues of P.w.D.
- Office of Chief Commissioner and the Office of State Commissioners of Persons with Disabilities has been given more powers.
- Broad-based Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability are to be set up to serve as apex policy-making bodies at the Central and State level.
- The number of types of disabilities has been increased from 7 to 21. The Central Government will have the power to add more types of disabilities in this list.
- National and State Fund will be created to provide financial support to persons with disabilities.

With the discussion of the above points, the speaker feels that there is a need to do more on the government's part. Also, the rights of P.w.D will be protected only if this Act will be implemented in its true spirit. The entire government and the public will have to be sensitized towards the needs and equality of P.w.D.

Third Speaker, **Dr. Hena N N, Lecturer IUCDS**, started her presentation with the words of Carl Jung “The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases “. She emphasized the Psycho-Social care for persons with disabilities (Intellectually Challenged) throughout her presentation. Also, she addressed the key challenges faced during COVID – 19. And the best solution during this pandemic in her view is inclusive education engaging the school family and the society. She emphasized the need for research in psychological interventions with carer or families, and the impact of housing, leisure, and

employment for this group of people. She concluded her presentation by citing the words of Catherine Pulsifer “We are all different, which is great because we are all unique. Without diversity, life would be very boring.”

The questions and their comments discussed after the presentation were mentioned below,

- Ignorance of “Samoohika Neethi Vakup” towards the Intellectually Challenged
- The data should be available at panchayath level
- Awareness classes should be taken at ground level
- Issues with getting UDID cards

Also, the feedback of the session was collected from the participants to improve the session that will be conducted in the mere future. The objective of the webinar was achieved. The overall session discussion effectively benefitted the participants.